



How effective is the impact of speaking and listening on writing within the wider curriculum?

Southwold Primary School Upper Phase

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of speaking and listening on writing within the wider curriculum in the Upper Phase of primary education. Using a focus group model, the study followed the impact of known speaking and listening strategies for writing development. For three academic half terms, all children were given the opportunity to experience a maximum of 5 taught sessions where speaking and listening or speaking and listen activities were at the core in the hope that these activities would promote high quality and varied writing outcomes. All twelve children tracked in the study made good progress in relation to the key skills that they used, resulting in the writing produced outside of a typical literacy lesson being more useful in assisting with both formative and summative assessments.

Introduction

Southwold School is a larger-than-average-sized primary school situated in Hackney, London. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are much higher than national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is also higher than average. Data shows that the vast majority of children make rapid and sustained progress across the school in writing given their varied starting points and well above the national average.

A specific area of focus across the school is increasing the opportunities for extended writing within the wider curriculum, with the view that these samples of writing could be used towards teacher's judgements at key assessment points throughout the year. This is also exemplified in The Interim Teacher Assessment Frameworks for Key Stage 2 (2016) which states that *'teachers must base their*

teacher assessment judgement on a broad range of evidence from across the curriculum for each pupil'.

The current status of assessment without levels cited in Commission on Assessment without Levels (2016), and Ofsted's stance on assessment (2005) agrees that assessment should focus on pupils' work, talking to children and observing lessons. Furthermore, there is no expectation that performance and pupil-tracking information should be presented in a particular format. This, in combination with the school agreed assessment policy ensures that formative and summative assessments are inter-related. It ensures that evidences from day-to-day learning and teaching can provide evidence over time for summative assessments and this was deemed to be the driver for the research focus.

Mercer (1995) recognised that there are three distinctive types of talk '*...disputational...cumulative... and exploratory...*' defined as '*social modes of thinking*', Wegerif and Mercer (1997). Miell et al (2007) suggest that Mercer's overall view was '*...that exploratory talk offers a potential for learning over and above that offered by the other two types of talk*'. Although this research does not measure or define the type of talk children will engage with during the intervention, it does recognise that the types of speaking and listening activities children encounter should have an impact on cognitive, social and linguistic development across the curriculum. An idea upheld by The National Curriculum (2014) that '*spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing*'. This document goes on to explain that the quality and variety is a vital factor for development. This paper recognises that a key limitation to its findings is the lack of measure placed on the speaking and listening activities but hope that the process involved in the planning of each activity helps to ensure activities are both rich in language and meet a variety of objectives set about in the National Curriculum for Spoken Language.

While children make good progress from their starting points in writing by the end of KS2, it was agreed that the opportunities to assess children's writing outside of children's literacy books was reduced mainly due to the quality of writing. A scrutiny of the writing samples pre-research showed that this was true for all children regardless of children's attainment. This scrutiny also revealed that teachers were over

reliant upon report writing when children wrote outside of their literacy lessons. Thus, increase the possibility of using genre specific skills and reducing the possibility of using the full range of age related skills.

To investigate this, a group of children were tracked across the term with specific intervention and data analysis points identified to review the effectiveness of the interventions. It was expected that the outcome of the project would result in teachers using a greater number of speaking and listening activities in both Science and Humanities to elicit high quality writing that in turn could be used as data towards end of year expectations.

Research Process

The project was co-ordinated by the Phase Leader and supported by six classroom teachers (including the Phase leader) and four Teaching Assistants. According to *Bell (2010)* the size of the sample should be proportionate to the population. Although the intervention was carried out with children (the population in this instance), a representational group of 18 children were identified for a manageable tracking group. Several sampling strategies were considered, however all were deemed to have limitations and be non-comparative of using a random selection process. Teachers were asked to randomly select one child each who was representational of a child working at developing, within and exceeding age related expectations. This was to ensure that the group represented a range of abilities within the classes and as such ensure the sample was representative of the cross-section. It was also intended that this group would create a baseline in which to set tasks, further informing the research.

Teachers discussed at phase level the existing teaching of literacy in their classes and approaches used to engage children in writing, with the focus on Speaking and listening activities. The Phase Leader provided teachers with a check list of focus opportunities to be introduced to medium term planning. It was recognised that this list would act as a stimulus to help discussions within the planning phase and was not exhaustive. The research would consist of 3 phases (the planning stage, carrying

out / conducting phase and the debrief / findings stage. The phases would be repeated each half term to ensure each class had the opportunity to collect evidence in both Science and Humanities.

In the first instance, teachers looked at themes for Spring 2017 and generate ideas of activities and desired outcomes from lessons. This initial brainstormed help partner teachers to choose their subject focus for both Spring 1 and Spring. The idea was that a year group focus on writing outcomes in Science in Spring 1 would then focus on writing outcomes in Humanities in Spring 2 and vice versa. Once subjects were decided, it was then important to focus discussions on individual lessons. Planning was then fine-tuned to reflect the wider discussion around outcomes, skills, speaking and listening stimuli to provide pupils with a range of opportunities to:

- Observe adults modelling S&L and recognise the impact
- Access high quality visuals (digital and hard) to
- Speak and listen to others within a range of structured activities and contexts, e.g. role play
- Speak and listen for different recognisable purposes
- Write for different purposes using a range of skills
- Review their writing and identify improvements

It was agreed that teachers would annotate existing plans where outcomes could be changed to extended writing outcomes without altering the existing learning. The initial plan was that each class would have 2 out of 6 of their lessons in the first half term evidenced with writing outcomes.

According to Goodwin (2006) '*writing will be at its strongest if it comes immediately after a drama activity and not later that day or the following day*'. This refers to as when the moment is 'hot'. This fit with the work the class teachers completed during the planning phase where a typical one hour lesson was split into teacher input, then speaking and listening task followed by children independent writing activity.

At the end of each writing session it was agreed that teachers would do an intense mark in accordance to the schools marking and feedback policy. It was deemed that if teachers fully marked each piece of extended writing, identifying the skills, it would make it easier for the Phase Leader to interpret the data in the final stages (see appendix G). Progress of the research was shared at weekly meetings.

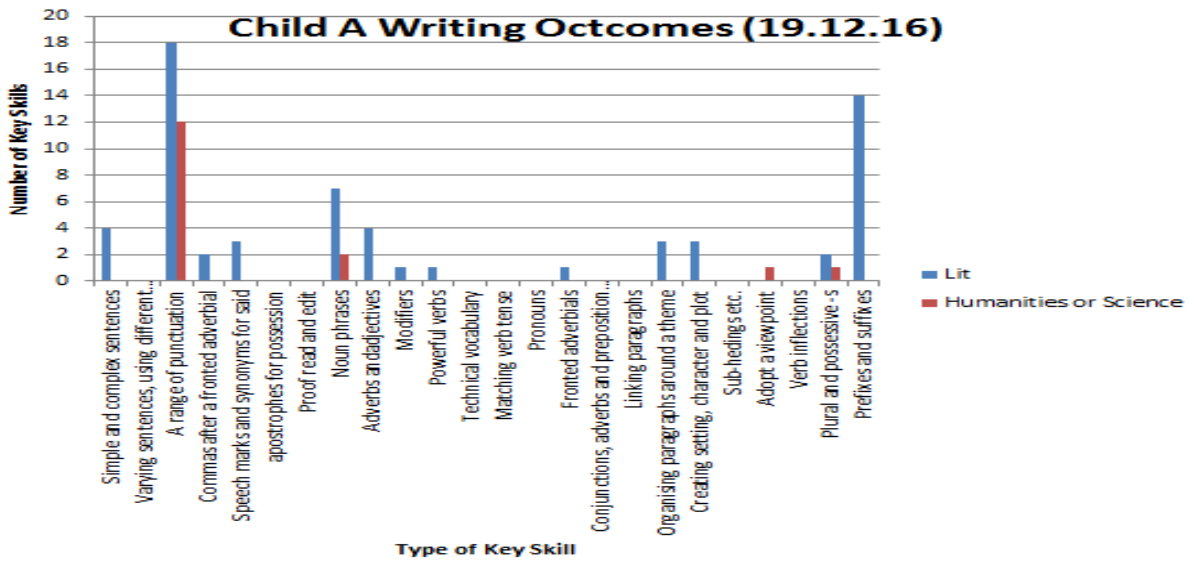
A fundamental change in the way in which writing in both science and humanities lessons took place was that prior to the research the success criteria's for individual lessons were entirely subject specific. It was deemed necessary to include at least one writing skill into the success criteria to allow children to work towards this during each lesson. This also meant that the teacher could easily identify next step targets and tailor subsequent lessons based upon children's responses.

Findings

The current study adopts a quantitative research approach despite the research question lending itself to a qualitative approach. Marshall (1996) *states 'the choice between quantitative and qualitative research methods should be determined by the research question, not by the preference of the researcher'*. This is because for the collection on children's verbal responses would become highly unlike to be unbiased given different teachers interpretations of the talk. Therefore, making the comparison of evidence collected more difficult. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) recognise that both approaches will have elements of each and therefore it is impossible to adopt an approach that is solely one.

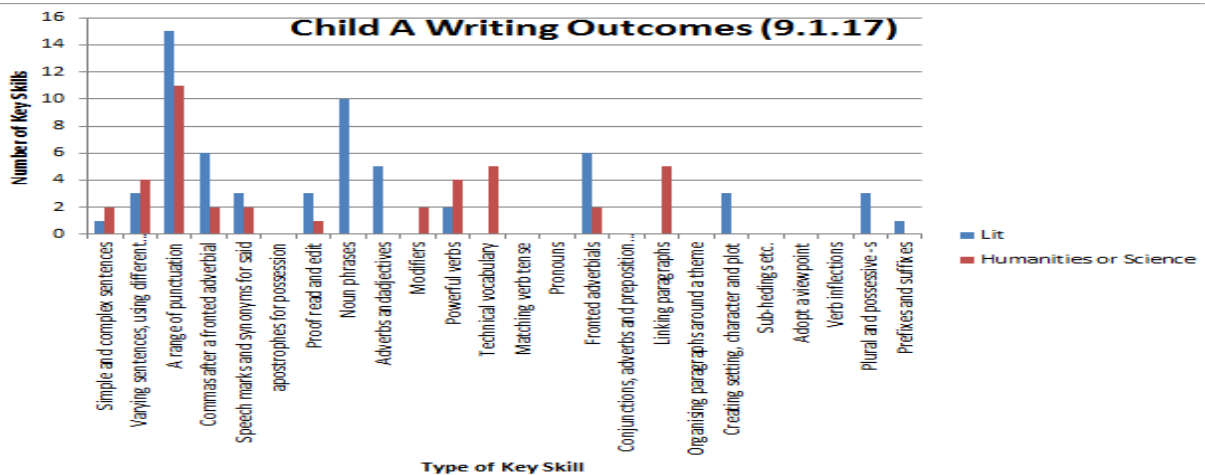
The children responded very well to the speaking and listening activities. There were a number of very quick noticeable differences within books over the course of the research. Children developed stamina for writing in humanities, which resulted in extended writing outcomes. Another noticeable different was that children were provided with the opportunity to write across a more varied range of genres. The acquisition of skills in literacy and humanities books increased over the period, as expected. The gap between the skills used in literacy and humanities narrowed significantly, (see Fig. 1, 2 and 3).

Fig 1



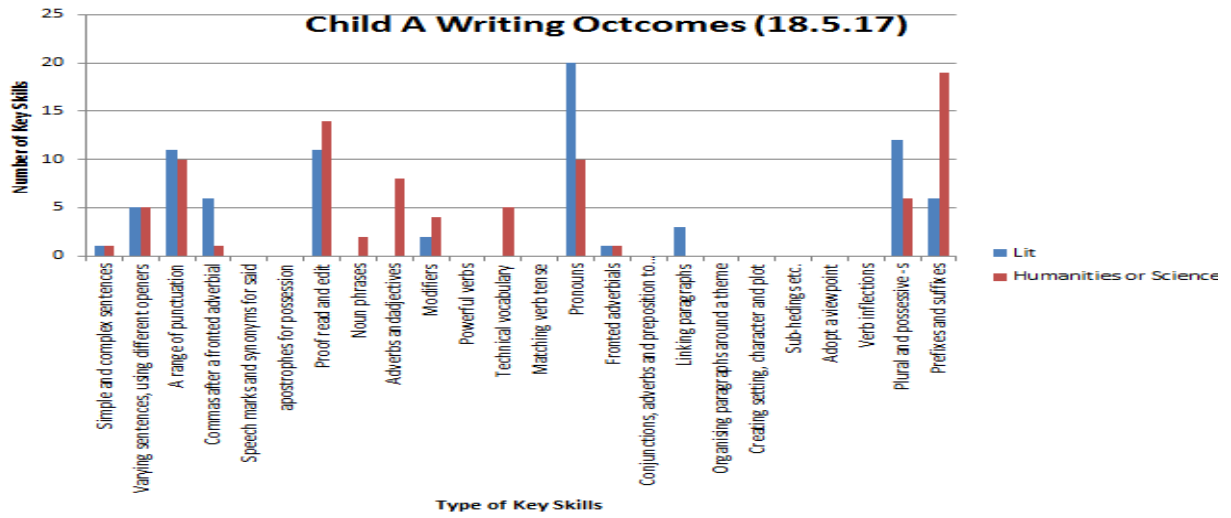
For this child it is very evident that they were able to draw upon a range of skills when writing at the beginning of the action research but at this point failed to transfer the range of writing skills at their disposal into their writing outside of their literacy lesson.

Fig.2



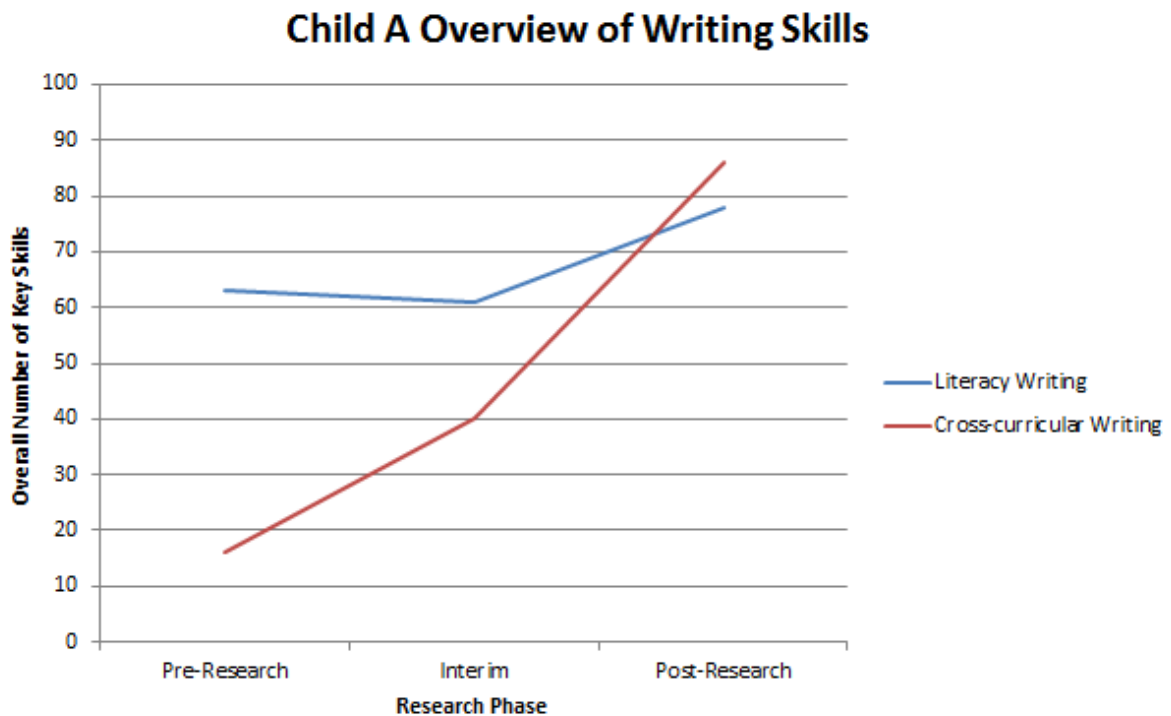
For this child it is evident that the range of skills used in humanities increased.

Fig 3



For example, Child A showed a percentage difference of -75% between the quality of literacy writing and non-core writing prior to the research. By the last data collection point this figure had risen to 10%, with the child demonstrating more key skills in humanities than in literacy (see Fig.4 and Fig.5).

Fig.4



Very similar results were shown across the sample size when making a comparison between the key skills children used prior to and post research in humanities. All

children decreased the overall percentage difference between overall key skills (see Fig 5).

Fig.5

Child	Year Group	Ability	Pre-Research Key Skills		Percentage change	Interim Key Skills		Percentage change	Post-Research Key Skills		Percentage change
			Key Skills used in literacy	Key Skills used in humanities		Key Skills used in literacy	Key Skills used in humanities		Key Skills used in literacy	Key Skills used in humanities	
Child A	4	More Abled	63	16	-75%	61	40	-34%	78	86	10%
Child B	4	M/A	41	12	-71%	44	23	-48%	58	46	-21%
Child C	4	Less Abled	40	13	-68%	47	42	-11%	52	45	-13%
Child D	5	More Abled	71	56	-21%	65	58	-11%	76	72	-5%
Child E	5	M/A	57	22	-61%	55	34	-38%	62	57	-8%
Child F	5	Less Abled	48	4	-92%	48	25	-48%	50	36	-28%
Child G	6	More Abled	59	21	-64%	64	46	-28%	83	79	-5%
Child H	6	M/A	55	13	-76%	57	39	-32%	71	58	-18%
Child I	6	Less Abled	43	16	-63%	55	27	-51%	64	49	-23%



Key Skills used in literacy



Key Skills used in humanities

When analysing the data for science writing the results did not follow the trend set in humanities. Where evidences from books showed that children were being provided with a variety of genres, children's work failed to show the same rate of increase of skills being used (See Fig.6)

Fig.6

Child	Year Group	Ability	Pre-Research Key Skills		Percentage change	Interim Key Skills		Percentage change	Post-Research Key Skills		Percentage change
			Key Skills used in literacy	Key Skills used in science		Key Skills used in literacy	Key Skills used in science		Key Skills used in literacy	Key Skills used in science	
Child A	4	More Abled	63	14	-78%	59	15	-75%	82	34	-59%
Child B	4	M/A	41	8	-80%	48	12	-75%	60	29	-52%
Child C	4	Less Abled	40	1	-98%	35	9	-74%	47	25	-47%
Child D	5	More Abled	71	12	-83%	54	16	-70%	86	33	-62%
Child E	5	M/A	57	10	-82%	56	15	-73%	58	29	-50%
Child F	5	Less Abled	48	6	-88%	51	9	-82%	46	16	-65%
Child G	6	More Abled	59	20	-66%	60	17	-72%	89	51	-43%
Child H	6	M/A	55	18	-67%	55	15	-73%	74	47	-36%
Child I	6	Less Abled	43	11	-74%	45	13	-71%	72	42	-42%



Key Skills used in literacy



Key Skills used in science

This was a point of discussion at one of the Phase weekly meetings where class teachers discussed the disadvantages and challenges they had faced during the implementation phase of the research.

The data at the three collection points showed that children were more confident using the key writing skills across the broader curriculum. The quality of writing

across all books improved and visible progress for writing is now evident in the vast majority of books across the sample size. Where visible progress is less evident across the sample, the rate of progress across literacy is not rapid. This suggests that these children find it more difficult to draw upon the age related key skills for their year group.

Impact and Conclusion

One of the limitations of this research is that it didn't take into account the types of activities children engaged with during their usual literacy sessions. The assumption is speaking impacts writing outcomes then children engaging in rich speaking and listening activities during their literacy lesson would make less progress when given an intervention of speaking and listening in non-core lessons. It also didn't take into account children's confidence and prior experiences of different genres. For example, Child A managed to use more key skills outside of literacy than in their normal literacy lessons. In analyses, this was the first time within the research phase that the genres in both subjects were the same. Taking into account that literacy occurred in the morning of the same day of the non-core writing, it could be deemed that Child A had had vital practice helping them to show better acquisition of skills in the afternoon. The research took no account of the size of work compared, where the assumption is that a paragraph would obtain fewer skills than a full page of writing from the same child given a few variables including aspiration. For this reason, if the research were to be repeated it would take on a quantitative approach as the research questions lends itself more to this approach as upheld by *Marshall (1996, P1)*. An evaluation of the quality of discourse would be completed based upon the children's interactions. This would then be compared to the number of key skills used. This would then be tracked to see if improvements over the course of the research were evident.

The findings raise questions based upon how best to support extending writing in science. Which genres lend themselves to each science theme and which hooks are best to stimulate each genre? One of the major issues that arose was the strain placed on teaching all the scientific knowledge, understanding of key vocabulary and fitting in the working scientifically objectives.

As a result of this research teachers involved in the study felt more confident in using non-core writing as an assessment tool for end of year teacher judgments and Literacy assessments show evidence of this across the phase suggest that the quality of this writing has increased.

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